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Dear Members of the Public Health Committee:

***I am writing in opposition to HB 5537, section 42, #6.***

I have a brother with autism and intellectual disabilities. Throughout my childhood, I went every week with my mom and brother for speech therapy for my brother Tyler. The Speech Language Pathologist often included me in Tyler's speech therapy lessons. We also had behavior analysts working with my brother at home and at school, where I was also included to help teach my brother.

What the Behavior Analysts did was very different from what the Speech Pathologist did. The Behavior Analysts focus on behavior and day to day living, while the Speech pathologist taught him how to speak, correctly and communicate.

While Behavior Analysts also worked on speech and communication, they also created programs to help Tyler learn how to dress himself, shower, have leisure and recreational skills, and reduced problem behaviors that had been interfering with his ability to learn anything. The Behavior Analysts taught the Speech Pathologists, Special Education Teachers and Paraprofessionals things like using positive reinforcement, and the Speech Pathologists taught the Behavior Analysts things like how to help students make certain sounds with their lips and tongues. They made a great team, but were considerably different in their skills as professionals.

I have been a peer model to show these kids proper behavior, and have both volunteered and worked at a private school for children with autism. I saw firsthand how Behavior Analysts, Psychologists, Speech Pathologist and Special Education Teachers all were needed to develop a comprehensive educational program for students with autism and other disabilities. Each of these different professionals contributed different areas of expertise to the team effort of designing each student's individualized education programs. I am concerned that by changing the scope of Speech Language Pathologists to include ABA, a widely different field, the overall quality of education will be devalued, as they would be required, or asked to provide services that they had not been trained for, which is neither fair to the Speech Language Pathologist, nor the many children in need of support.

I am currently a student at UCONN, and there I see my friends taking classes to become Speech Pathologists, Teachers, and Psychologists. Their education is not the same, and what they do is very different.

My brother Tyler, and thousands of Connecticut children like him need ABA to maximize their ability to learn and become the best they can be when they become adults. Especially when the child in question has very intensive needs, it's imperative to make sure each professional is available, well trained, and knowledgeable. As the parents of children with special needs are not always aware of how to advocate for their child, or what needs to be done to ensure the greatest possible success for their child and their family life as a whole, it's imperative that the professionals in their line of education are able to provide *all* the required support. Every child, family, and student, deserves the full capabilities to self-realization, learning the means to support oneself as best they can, and non-discriminatory education. In order to realize this, we need to ensure the proper discourses are possible *between* certified professionals, and we cannot expect professionals in one field to provide services they had not been properly certified for, or trained for.

Thank you for your time. I hope you will join me in opposing this proposed change.

Yours truly,

Meredith O. Letso